

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SAB-01 SAM-01 SAJ-01 ACDA-05 IO-10 EB-07

COME-00 INT-05 OES-03 FEAE-00 OMB-01 CIEP-01 TRSE-00

AID-05 /094 W

----- 025366

R 241319Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2476

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: BTRA, OVIP, XF, SY

SUBJECT: TIME MIDEAST "NEWSTOUR" FOR BUSINESS LEADERS

1. SUMMARY: TIME NEWSTOUR'S TWO-DAY VISIT TO SYRIA HELPED DEMONSTRATE US INTEREST IN BROADENING AND IMPROVING ITS RELATIONS WITH SARG. HIGHLIGHTS WERE VISIT TO KUNEITRA ON GOLAN HEIGHTS AND TWO-HOUR MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ASAD WHO DESCRIBED SYRIAN POSITION AT LENGTH AND IN MODERATE TERMS. PRESIDENT STATED SYRIA WOULD ACCEPT DEMILITARIZATION OF GOLAN HEIGHTS IN SETTLEMENT CONTEXT IF ISRAEL DEMILITARIZED TO SAME DEPTH. ALSO INDICATED HE HAD QUESTIONS RE STEP-BY-STEP DIPLOMACY BUT HAD NOT CLOSED DOOR TO FURTHER STEPS.

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END SUMMARY.

2. TIME, INC. NEWSTOUR HAD SUCCESSFUL 28-HOUR VISIT TO DAMASCUS JANUARY 21-23. AFTER BEING GREETED AT AIRPORT BY SYRIAN DEPUTY ECON MIN DR. ABDULLAH AZMEH, MININFO REPS AND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY OFFICIALS, GROUP DEPARTED FOR VISIT TO KUNEITRA ON GOLAN HEIGHTS. EARLY AFTERNOON LUNCHEON AT RESIDENCE WAS PRECEDED BY AMBASSADOR'S BRIEFING DURING WHICH TOUR MEMBERS SHOWED LIVELY INTEREST IN SYRIAN ASPECTS OF ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE.

3. ACCOMPANIED BY AMBASSADOR, NEWSTOUR HAD OVER TWO-HOUR PRIVATE MEETING WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD EVENING JAN 21. ASAD WELCOMED GROUP WARMLY AND EXPRESSED SYRIA'S INTERESTS IN IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH US AND AMERICAN UNDERSTANDING OF SYRIAN POLICIES, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARDS TO "PEACE AND WAR". HE EXPRESSED SYRIAN DESIRE FOR PEACE BASED ON JUSTICE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF UN RESOLUTIONS. SYRIAN DESIRE TO LIBERATE OCCUPIED TERRITORY DID NOT CONFLICT WITH ITS DESIRE FOR LASTING PEACE, BUT CEASEFIRE WAS NOT PEACE, AND ANY ACCEPTANCE OF IMPOSED OCCUPATION OF SYRIAN TERRITORY WOULD BE SURRENDER NOT PEACE. ASAD ALSO VIGOROUSLY DEFENDED PROPOSITION THAT ISRAELIS MUST DEAL WITH PLO IN SETTLING THE QUESTION OF LEGITIMATE PALESTINIAN RIGHTS. PLO WAS NOT A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION, HE SAID, AND ITS LEADERS HAD DEMONSTRATED REMARKABLE MATURITY.

4. IN ANSWER TO QUESTION WHETHER WAR WOULD RESUME IF NO PROGRESS MADE TOWARD PEACE IN NEXT THREE MONTHS, ASAD SAID THAT SINCE THIS MATTER CONCERNED MORE THAN ONE PARTY, NO ONE COULD PREDICT FUTURE, BUT NEXT FEW MONTHS WERE FULL OF DANGER IF THERE WAS NO PROGRESS. REPLYING TO SECOND QUESTION ON WHETHER SYRIA WOULD RECOGNIZE EXISTENCE OF ISRAEL IF UN 242 WAS CARRIED OUT, ASAD SAID RECOGNITION WAS JUST ONE ASPECT OF SOVEREIGNTY. HOWEVER, SYRIA, HE ADDED IN SAME BREATH, WAS READY TO IMPLEMENT ALL RPT ALL PARTS OF RES 242. ASKED WHETHER PALESTINE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STATE ON WEST BANK AND SINAI WOULD BE SUFFICIENT FOR SOLUTION, ASAD REPLIED THAT SINCE ARABS RECOGNIZED POLITICAL EXISTENCE OF PLO, HE DID NOT LIKE TO SPEAK FOR PALESTINIANS BUT HE COULD SAY THAT IF PALESTINIANS GAINED BACK WEST BANK AND SINAI IT WOULD BE "A CONSTRUCTIVE THING."

5. ASKED HIS VIEWS ON STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO SETTLEMENT,

ASAD REPLIED AT LENGTH THAT IMPORTANT THING WAS OVERALL
SETTLEMENT. SIGNIFICANT AND RAPID STEPS COULD BE
USEFUL BUT LITTLE STEPS TAKEN ON ONLY ONE FRONT AT A
TIME AND SPREAD OVER LONG TIME PERIOD WERE NOT
ACCEPTABLE. ONLY AIM OF SUCH STEPS WOULD BE TO DIVIDE
ARABS. HE SAID HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT "STEP-BY-STEP"
AS DEFINED BY AMERICAN DIPLOMACY MEANT.

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6. ISRAELIS, ASAD CONTINUED, CLAIMED SYRIANS
WERE NOT INTERESTED IN PEACE BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT
REBUILDING KUNEITRA. HOW, ASAD ASKED, COULD SYRIA
REBUILD NOW WITH TOWN UNDER CONSTANT THREAT FROM
ISRAELI GUNS ON SURROUNDING HILLS AND WITH ITS
SURROUNDING AGRICULTURAL LAND STILL UNDER ISRAELI
CONTROL. PEOPLE NEEDED POSSIBILITY OF LEADING

NORMAL LIVES BEFORE RETURNING TO KUNEITRA. REPLYING TO QUESTION ON DEMILITARIZATION AND SECURE BORDERS, ASAD SAID OCTOBER 73 HAD PROVEN SECURE BORDERS IN GEOGRAPHIC SENSE WERE NOT POSSIBLE WITH CAPABILITIES OF MODERN ARTILLERY. ISRAEL WAS STRESSING SECURITY IN ORDER TO MASK EXPANSION. BY WHAT RIGHT, HE ASKED, SHOULD ISRAEL'S PRINCIPAL SECURITY LINES BE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ESTABLISHED ON SYRIAN GOLAN RATHER THAN ON ISRAEL'S OWN GALILEE HEIGHTS. WHY SHOULD ISRAEL'S SECURE BORDERS BE 50 KILOMETERS FROM DAMASCUS AND 300 KILOMETERS FROM TEL AVIV? AS FOR A DEMILITARIZED BUFFER ZONE IN CONNECTION WITH AN ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL UNDER UN RES 242, ASAD SAID SYRIA WOULD AGREE TO SUCH A ZONE SO LONG AS BOTH SIDES (SYRIA AND ISRAEL) AGREED ON EQUAL TERMS.

7. ASAD CLOSED MEETING BY THANKING GROUP FOR VISITING SYRIA AND INVITING AMERICAN COMPANIES TO WORK IN SYRIA. JAMIESON OF EXXON SAID HE HAD ONLY RECENTLY LEARNED OF SYRIAN INTERESTS IN DISCUSSING PETROLEUM DEVELOPMENT WITH AMERICAN FIRMS AND ASSURED PRESIDENT EXXON REPS WOULD RESPOND RAPIDLY (SEPTEL).

8. DINNER HOSTED BY MINISTER OF ECONOMY IMADI OFFERED NEWSTOUR OPPORTUNITY TO MEET AND TALK WITH NUMBER OF SYRIAN OFFICIALS AND BUSINESSMEN.

9. MORNING JANUARY 22 DEVOTED BY MOST TO SHOPPING AND SIGHTSEEING. FRANK PACE AND ECONOFF CALLED ON MINECON IMADI TO DISCUSS INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE SERVICE CORPS (SEPTEL). GROUP DELAYED DEPARTURE FOR JORDAN UNTIL 1400 HOURS IN EXPECTATION THAT ARAFAT WOULD ARRIVE FROM BEIRUT FOR MEETING. THIS DID NOT MATERIALIZE.

10. COMMENT: SYRIANS WERE IMPRESSED THAT GROUP OF AMERICA'S MOST INFLUENTIAL BUSINESSMEN WAS TAKING INITIATIVE IN VISITING ARAB COUNTRIES AND ATTEMPTING GAIN BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. THEY WERE ALSO IMPRESSED BY NEWSTOUR'S OBVIOUS INTEREST IN LEARNING AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE ABOUT SYRIA DURING ITS SHORT VISIT. FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW, VISIT, SANDWICHED IN BETWEEN THOSE OF CODEL PERCY, CODEL MATHIAS AND DAVID ROCKEFELLER, WAS IMPORTANT AND SUCCESSFUL INDICATION OF US DESIRE TO BROADEN ITS CONTACTS AND RELATIONS WITH SARG. MURPHY

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